

Target Reading Skill: Using Word Analysis

Use Prefixes and Roots

In the same way that learning the root of a word can help you determine its meaning, learning a prefix or the part of a word that can go in front of the root of a word can provide clues to a word's definition. Prefixes can completely change the meaning of the word. Prefixes can show quantity as in *unicycle* (one wheel) and *bicycle* (two wheels) and *centipede* (one hundred legs) and *millipede* (one thousand legs).

A prefix can also serve to show time as in *forecast* (calculate before), *precede* (to go before), *antebellum* (before the war), *postwar* (after the war), or repetition such as *rewrite* (to write again), *redundant* (repetition of flow), *reverse* (to turn backward).

Prefixes can also show direction or position: *submarine* (beneath the water), *injection* (a fluid that is forced or driven into), *circumference* (to carry around), *perimeter* (around measure) and negation as in *disarm* (reversal of arms), *misjudge* (judge wrongly), *contradict* (oppose what is said), and *de-construct* (undo construction).

To demonstrate the power of prefixes in changing the meaning of words, read and compare the following two sentences.

The Roman army was considered skilled, competent, and organized.

The Roman army was considered *unskilled*, *incompetent*, and *disorganized*.

As you can see, use of prefixes can literally rewrite history.

Directions: Read the following passage and circle the prefixes. Break the words you have circled into prefix and root word parts to learn their meanings. Then, write a paragraph of your own describing something you have made or constructed. Use at least six words with prefixes.

Battles between the Greeks and Persians recurred. As a common enemy, Persia distracted the Greek city-states from fighting each other. Briefly united, Greece drove away the Persian armies. The Persians were finally defeated. Postwar Athens enjoyed a period of democracy. Soon, however, Athens began to treat its allied city-states unfairly.
